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Original from the
Rev. Author to his friend
- the Rev. A. Cranmer.

4421

SERMON,

PREACHED

ON THE 9TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 1799,

AT THE

ORDINATION

OF THE

Rev. CALEB BRADLEY,

TO THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE

CHURCH AND PEOPLE OF GOD, IN THE

SECOND PARISH OF FALMOUTH.

BY HENRY CUMMINGS A. M.
Pastor of the Church in Billerica.

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A SERMON.



ROMANS, XI. 13.

“ I MAGNIFY MINE OFFICE.”

As every one, in any kind of office, is under some special obligations conformable to the nature and design of the office, which he sustains; so the christian minister, in addition to those obligations, which are common to him and others, as men, brethren and fellow-citizens, is obliged to some special services answerable to the design and intention of his holy calling; and when, with conscientious diligence and fidelity, he applies himself to the special duties of his sacred employment, he does, in the most true and proper sense, *magnify his office.*

THE inspired PAUL, in the words before us, might have particular reference to his apostolic office; but abstracting from every thing peculiar to that office, or

that distinguished it from the office of an ordinary christian minister, the words are well adapted to afford instruction to the preachers of the gospel, in all ages, and to lead them to reflect upon the obligations they are under, to attend to the important business of their holy function, and to live up to their sacred character.

FOR though the ministers of CHRIST since the apostolic age, cannot claim an equality, in point of authority, with the extraordinary ministers of that day, who received their commission directly from heaven, and acted under the immediate guidance of the Spirit of GOD; yet, when regularly introduced to this sacred business, according to divine appointment, they are to be considered as called to the same noble service of instructing mankind in the interesting concerns of religion and another world, and promoting, as far as possible, the conversion and salvation of sinners.

THE subject therefore, being of high concernment to all classes of people, especially to those, who are or expect to be devoted to the service of the sanctuary, I cannot but flatter myself, that I shall be indulged with the candid attention of this auditory, upon the present occasion, while I make a few observations on the origin and proper intention of the office of a christian minister, and offer to consideration, my manner of thinking concerning *magnifying* the same, and the importance of so doing, with the interspersions of some occasional remarks.

The benevolent Father of the universe, with an eye of benignity, beholding the human race involved in guilt and sunk into a state of gross ignorance and deep degeneracy, was pleased, in order to recover them from this wretched condition, and make them wise and happy, to send his *only begotten son* into the world, not only to *make his soul an offering for sin*; but also to give all needed information and instruction relative to futurity, and the things that pertain to the pardon and salvation of sinful men; to exhibit an example of piety and purity, and bring into view the most powerful arguments and motives, to excite sinners to labor after repentance and a change; and, at the same time, to encourage them with gracious promises of divine assistance, to aid their endeavors for acquiring that holy character, which is a necessary qualification for heavenly felicity and glory.

THIS same divine teacher and instructor, for the promotion of the merciful design of his mission, after he had finished his personal ministry on earth and ascended to heaven, was pleased to appoint an order of men, to be continued in succession to the end of the world; whose peculiar business it should be, to diffuse the knowledge of his religion among mankind, by preaching the gospel doctrine of salvation, in that and following ages; and who might serve as a medium of conveying the blessings of evangelical light and grace to the remotest posterity. He first sent forth his apostles to publish the *glad-tidings* of salvation to all nations,

whom he furnished with supernatural gifts and powers, to be employed as credentials of their divine commission, and as proper expedients for arresting the attention of mankind, as occasions might require. To these he gave authority to ordain others to the same sacred employment of preaching the gospel ; granting likewise the same authority to the ministers of his religion, in every age. And,

UNDER God, we have reason to ascribe it to the institution of the Christian ministry, that the glorious gospel was first propagated among the nations of the earth, and that so many countries have been, and still are blessed with the light of it. For had not such provision been made, by the Divine Author of our holy religion, for spreading, preserving and perpetuating it, it would probably have died in its infancy, and, soon after his ascension, ceased to have had a being among men. For even now, although the Christian religion be committed to writing, and received by a considerable part of the world, as of undoubted divine authority ; yet it is reasonable to suppose, that the knowledge and belief of it would soon be banished from the earth, or be confined to a very few, of a studious and speculative turn, should preaching and hearing come to an end, and people be universally left without public teaching and religious instruction. For such is manifestly the inconsiderateness of the generality ; such their indisposition and aversion to study and inquiry, as well as want of leisure therefor ; such their love of the world and the

pleasures and delights of sense ; such in short, the prevalence of irregular passions and affections among them ; that they would pay little or no regard to a written revelation put into their hands, did not the teachers of religion frequently call their attention thereto, and press the consideration of its important doctrines, instructions and motives. There are few comparatively, if any, even among those, who have the sacred scriptures in their hands, to whom preaching is not necessary, in order to beget or confirm within them, that *faith which worketh by love*, and which is a requisite preparation for pardon and eternal life.

THE design of CHRIST's advent into the world being therefore to enlighten, reform and save men from their sins, and make them everlastingly happy ; and he having, in pursuance of this design, and with a view to promote it, instituted the preaching of the gospel, to be continued in all ages ; it is obvious to infer, that the proper business of those, who are devoted to this sacred service, is to endeavor to display the doctrines, precepts and sanctions of Christianity, in such a manner, as shall have the likeliest tendency to promote the conviction and conversion of sinners, and engage them in such exercises and pursuits, as shall most directly conduce to their eternal salvation.

I MIGHT largely expatiate on this topic ; but as I wish to be as concise as possible, let it suffice (for expressing my ideas) to attempt a brief description of the

Christian minister, who can, with propriety, adopt the language of the text, and apply it to himself. In describing such a minister, I shall not only take it for granted, that he is fully convinced of the divinity of the gospel, but proceed on the supposition, that he is also well qualified, as to natural abilities, knowledge and literature, for the sacred business, in which he is engaged; it being evident to common sense, that no one, greatly deficient in these respects, is capable of executing the work of the ministry, with dignity and advantage, without miraculous assistance. But,

Not content with the bare possession of qualifications requisite to enable him to act worthily in his office, the faithful minister will diligently employ his faculties, both natural and acquired, in earnest endeavours to *shew himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.* Actuated by a lively faith in the doctrines and principles of the religion, which he teaches, and keeping in view the important end and design of his office, he will apply himself to the business of it, with persevering diligence, daily imploring, under a consciousness of his own insufficiency, the guidance and assistance of the *Father of lights*, and source of all gracious influence and aid. In the prosecution of the several branches of duty pertaining to his sacred calling, he will repair to the sacred scriptures, as his guide and directory, and adhere to them, as the proper test, for the trial of all matters, relating either to doctrine, worship or manners; *not teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,*

nor entertaining his hearers with puzzling and uncertain speculations, that *minister strife rather than godly edifying*. Influenced by the love of truth, he will avail himself of all human helps and assistances in his power, for the right understanding of scripture doctrines; but will not suffer any human schemes, nor a bigoted deference for any great names, among uninspired mortals, to abate his veneration for the sacred oracles. In order to persuade men to become willing subjects of that moral kingdom, which God hath erected on earth, under the administration of his Son, he will endeavor in the most perspicuous and convincing manner, to explain the nature, constitution and laws of it, together with the promises and threatenings made use of to enforce obedience. With the same view, he will endeavor to excite, in the minds of men, suitable affections and regards towards the glorious Son of God, the Illustrious Plenipotentiary of Heaven, by displaying, according to the instructions of the gospel, the supereminent dignity of his personal character, together with the important offices, which he sustains, in reference to us, as Redeemer, Mediator and Judge. And,

As the gospel, in order to reconcile men to God and his government, exhibits his character in the most amiable point of view, representing him as a Being of supreme excellence and goodness, always tempering his majesty and sovereignty with benignity and grace; so, the christian minister (whom I am now describing) for the advancement of the same noble design, will make it

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his serious endeavor, to display the perfections of the Deity, the wonders of his power, wisdom and benevolence, in such a captivating manner, as shall be best adapted to affect the heart with delightful admiration, and excite those sentiments of complacency, esteem and gratitude, mixed with reverence, which are a necessary preparation for the kingdom of glory. Accordingly in discoursing on the majesty, sovereignty and absolute dominion of God, he will take care not to draw a veil over his essential goodness; nor to keep out of sight those moral beauties and glories of his nature, which render him the proper object of the supreme affection and most pleasing contemplation of the intelligent creation; in the view whereof, the soul is inspired and cheered with internal, devout and joyful regards, the proper fruits and effects of overflowing love. With equal caution, when celebrating the unbounded goodness of God, of which the works of creation and providence, together with the redemption of men by his meritorious Son, afford the brightest evidences, he will take care not to exclude the ideas of an holy, wise and just Legislator, impartial Judge, and almighty Sovereign. In short, instead of separating the perfections of the Deity, and exalting one attribute on the ruins of another, he will represent all as conspiring, in everlasting harmony, to form the grandest and most amiable character in the universe. And,

CONSIDERING that it is one important end of the christian religion, to promote *peace on earth, and good*

will among men, the preacher now under description, will do all that in him lies, in pursuance of the business of his holy profession, to suppress the operations of envy, revenge and ill-nature, and to persuade men to cultivate a meek and gentle spirit, with all those dispositions of candor, charity and good will, which are the brightest and most glorious characteristics of a true disciple of the benevolent JESUS. Averse to that self-applauding pride and censorious bigotry, which sour the spirits of unenlightened zealots of all parties, he never suffers circumstantial differences in opinion or modes of worship, to fire his soul with an anathematizing flame, or to exclude from his friendly regards sincere christians of any denomination. Yea, his generous and noble soul, emancipated from the enslaving power of party-prejudice, and enlarged by the warmest sentiments of diffusive charity, embraces with cordial affection, all persons of every nation, who *fear God and work righteousness*, although in regard to many things pertaining to religion, he may be confident, that they labor under great ignorance and mistakes. In fine, while, in opposition to infidels and sceptics, he contends earnestly for the faith, and zealously advocates the doctrines and principles of christianity, he will be solicitous to give a visible specimen of the excellency of this religion in his own temper and conduct, that others observing its sacred rules and precepts exemplified in real life, may be captivated with its beauties, and charmed into a compliance with its holy laws and requirements.

EVERY christian minister, who answers the portrait attempted above, must be acknowledged as acting with dignity in his profession, and *magnifying his office*. Even the profane and vicious part of the world, if they be not lost to all sense of honor and propriety, will regard such a character with high estimation. Though libertines refuse to submit to the discipline of religion in practice; yet there is reason to believe, that generally they approve of it in theory, and have also an inward veneration for those preachers, who are obviously actuated by its principles, and do themselves comply with its sacred maxims, while they zealously inculcate them on others.

It will not be pretended, that all who engage in the work of the ministry answer the above description. Possibly there are none to whom it will apply, in its full extent, without any deficiency or the least failure. Mistakes, errors and frailties, of one kind or another, are unavoidably incident to mankind, in the present state of darkness and temptation. The clergy are not raised above the condition of humanity. They are compassed about with the common infirmities of human nature, and are the subjects of like passions with others. Candor will overlook common inadvertences and failings in all. But so far as a man's falling short of the mark, may be justly imputed to some faulty cause in himself, he is censurable.

It cannot be denied, but that there are some unworthy persons in all professions, who stoop below their

dignity, and are a disgrace to the office which they sustain. It will be conceded, that, from the early days of christianity, there have been some, in all parts of the christian world, who, after having been ordained to preach the gospel, have, by a very culpable impropriety of conduct, dishonored their office, and exposed themselves to merited censure and reproach. When a man, voluntarily devoted to this important service, forgets his sacred character and solemn obligations, as an ambassador of CHRIST, and perverts his holy office to the purposes of pride, ambition and avarice; when he takes occasion from it, *to lord it over God's heritage*, and employs it as an engine for gratifying his selfish affections, and promoting schemes of self-aggrandizement; when he plays upon the passions, upon the credulity and superstition of the illiterate classes of people, in order to procure popular applause, or endeavors to frighten his hearers into a veneration for his person, by assuming the positive tone of infallibility, annexing the stamp of fundamentality to every article of his creed, and representing those, who do not, in all points, think as he does, nor believe as he teaches, as in a sure way to damnation, though they be ever so careful to *order their conversation aright*; when a minister of the gospel, in either of these ways, or in any others, from similar motives, counteracts and violates the obligations and duties of his office, he magnifies himself indeed, but degrades his office, and gives occasion to the enemies of our holy religion, in their sneering way, to call it priestianity.

THEY who behave well, ought not indeed to suffer reproach on account of the faults of their brethren. To vilify and calumniate those, who act with dignity in their office, because some engaged in the same professional business, expose themselves to merited disgrace, by their bad conduct, is contrary to reason and common sense. But as unreasonable as it is, blind prejudice, with undistinguishing censure, often casts foul aspersions on an whole order, because there are some bad characters belonging to it. The Christian ministry are peculiarly liable to such illiberal treatment; especially from libertines and sceptics, who disrelish every thing that savors of religion, or bears any relation to christian worship. Ill-affected towards the preachers of the gospel, such men generally treat them with obloquy; and from the imprudence or misconduct of a few, take occasion to traduce the clergy, at large, as a very weak, superstitious or ill-designing order of men. This is ungenerous and indicative of a bad heart.

IN regard to the clergy of New-England, persuaded I am, that every person of tolerable information and candor, will allow, that, with very few exceptions, from the first advent of our forefathers into this western world, to the present day, they have *magnified their office*, by a conscientious and faithful application to the duties of it, so far as ability and circumstances would permit. And there is the greatest reason to believe, that in general, they have been influenced by noble mo-

tives ; especially when it is considered that some other line of business, might have afforded them far more promising prospects, in regard to temporalities.

IN those countries, where special honors and emoluments of a worldly nature, are connected with the clerical office, it is no wonder if the motives of ambition and avarice prevail on many to take holy orders, without any regard to the present or future happiness of those, whom they undertake to instruct in the great things of religion. Under such circumstances, it may be expected, that the views of worldly preferment and gain, will have a mighty influence on some selfish mortals, to persuade them, that they are moved by the *Holy Ghost*, to engage in the work of the gospel-ministry. But it is well known, that in this country, the office of a clergyman, being unconnected with riches and temporal honors, offers no very captivating allurements to any, who do not extend their views into futurity, and look for their reward, in the regions of immortality. Far from being lucrative, or eligible, as a path to wealth and promotion, this office, at best, promises no greater temporal reward, than a bare competence. It seldom raises any above, but often reduces those who engage in it, to a condition below mediocrity.*

* THE generality of the clergy, having expended their patrimony in their education, have no other resources for supplying themselves or their families with necessaries, but their annual stipends. These annuities, although, in common cases, when paid with promptness, improved with nice economy.

Some of the sacred order are indeed in a state of affluence ; but this is not owing to the profits of their office, but to other causes. These however, being in more independent circumstances, and consequently more free from perplexing interruptions, than the generality of their clerical brethren, are, on that account, the better able to prosecute the work of the ministry with close application, and under better advantages for rendering themselves extensively useful. But,

WHATEVER difference there may be between the ministers of the gospel, in regard to advantages for close application to the line of their profession, or with respect to their capacity of doing more or less good, arising from external circumstances ; yet every one may be faithful. And he, who acquits himself with fidelity, in the discharge of his sacred office, applying himself as closely to the peculiar business of it, as circumstances and a proper attention to other calls of indispensable duty will permit, is entitled to the respect due to one, who *magnifies his office*, and may, with animating hopes of the approbation of his divine LORD and Master, anticipate that *Euge, Well done good and faithful servant*. This must be a solacing consideration to every christian minister, and a mighty encourage-

and not reduced in value by depreciation, they may be sufficient to enable the receivers to make a decent and reputable appearance in the world, suitable to their station and sacred calling while they live, yet seldom put them on even ground with other professions, in regard to ability for making provision for the comfort and support of their families, after their ~~disease~~ *decease*

ment to engage him in a constant practical regard to the duties of his office, as far as his ability extends, and his condition in life will allow.* And,

WHOEVER will attend to consequences will have the clearest conviction, that the ministers of the gospel are under the strongest imaginable obligations to use their best endeavors to *fulfil the ministry, which they have received of the LORD*, and to *magnify their office*, in some such manner, as has been represented above. The most important interests of others conspire with their own, to bind this duty upon them, and enforce the earnest prosecution of it. The religion of JESUS, which they are called to explain and inculcate, combines every consideration, which can be derived from the present or future state, adapted to operate in a way of motive, or moral suasion, to engage men in such a course of conduct, as will afford the purest pleasures and delights to individuals, and render each one a blessing to all around him, as far as the sphere of his influence and power extends. This holy religion, when displayed in its native beauty and intrinsic excellence, hath an evident tendency to quiet the turbulence of the human

* Though there are some men so unreasonable, as to expect to reap where they have not sowed, and to gather where they have not sowed, yet this description of an *hard master* will not apply to the merciful REDEEMER of men; for he hath fully assured us, that he requires only the improvement of given talents; and that he will hereafter accept and reward all, who serve him, in sincerity, according to the measure and proportion of their several abilities and advantages, in the stations and spheres of action assigned them by providence, in this probationary state.

passions, to meliorate the tempers of men, to subdue or restrain those base lusts, which are a source of infinite mischief and misery, and to promote such a reciprocal interchange of kind and benevolent offices, as will lay the surest foundation for peace and harmony among men, in all their social relations and connections. The christian minister therefore, is charged with a most important service, closely connected with the welfare of society and happiness of mankind, even in this world ; which cannot but be a very weighty and influential consideration with him, if he have an heart warmed with sentiments of generous philanthropy. But,

A CONSIDERATION of greater weight and efficacy, is, that the everlasting salvation of men in a future state is depending, and their eternal interests at stake. It cannot but be very affecting to every serious and godly minister, to reflect, that consequences of everlasting concernment, are connected with the sacred work, which he has undertaken. Christianity being evidently calculated, and it being manifestly the ultimate aim and design of it, to purge men from moral defilement, and cure their moral disorders ; to furnish their minds with the best principles, and train them up to an holy character, in order to their being capable of GOD's pardoning mercy, and qualified for supreme felicity in his heavenly presence : such being the nature and design of the christian religion, the faithful minister, who has himself imbibed the true spirit of it, and is actuated by a generous concern for the eternal salvation of men in the

coming world, will feel himself obliged to do all he can, in pursuance of his office, to *save souls from death*, and guide them in the way that leads to immortal life and blessedness, beyond the bounds of time.

THEIR responsibility to the great HEAD of the church, is another argument, which shews of what vast importance it is, that the ministers of the gospel comply with the obligations of their holy office. It is a solemn consideration, that they are amenable to the glorious IMMANUEL, who is ordained to preside at the great *day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*, before whose awful tribunal they must finally appear, to answer for their conduct, in that sacred sphere of action in which they were placed. And in connection with the considerations before mentioned, it is impossible to conceive of a more mighty motive to fidelity, in the discharge of the duties of their ministerial profession, than an impressive sense of this solemn truth, that *they watch for souls, as those that must give an account.*

LET me here observe, that while the ministers of the gospel, under the powerful influence of the considerations aforesaid, take care to fulfil the obligations of their holy calling, they are justly entitled to the respect and esteem of their fellow-men; being engaged in a work, which hath a direct tendency to promote the grand interest of human nature, both in this world and that which is to come.

WHEN it is considered, that christianity, without abridging any of those essential rights of man, which the great AUTHOR of our being hath chartered to us in the constitution of our nature, doth really incorporate into its system the fundamental principles of civil liberty and social happiness, and conduce directly to the welfare of mankind, wherever it is embraced, by guiding societies and individuals into those ways of wisdom and benevolence, which, being equally exempt from the abuses of power and excesses of licentious freedom, lead to as great peace and felicity, as the present frame of human nature, and the state of things in these sublunary climes, can admit; when it is further considered, that christianity exhibiteth to view a future more important state of existence, giving us the most assured hopes of a final deliverance from sin and all its sad consequences, on condition of repentance and amendment, and opening before us such bright prospects into a world of glory and endless beatitude beyond this life, as afford the greatest present consolations, serving mightily to alleviate the cares and assuage the sorrows unavoidably incident to this state of mortality; when these things are considered, it may be reasonably expected, that the teachers of this excellent religion, while they *magnify their office*, will meet with a very kind reception among all the friends of society and lovers of mankind, and be welcomed, by the judicious and well-disposed part of every community, in that language, *How beautiful are the feet of those, who preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.*

BUT though from its obvious tendency to promote happiness, one would think that the gospel must recommend itself to all, who are acquainted with it; yet some seem to have conceived an unaccountable prejudice against it, as a grievous yoke of superstition and folly; and on that ground appear ready, on all occasions, to vilify the christian ministry, and, by invidious sneers and invectives, to expose the whole order to contempt and ridicule. Ill-affected to the gospel-doctrine, such men aim a mortal wound against it through the sides of its teachers, and plainly shew, that, was it in their power, they would extinguish the light of the christian revelation, restore the age of uninformed and misguided reason, and once more involve the world in the shades of heathen darkness, denominated illuminatism, in the dialect of modern atheistical philosophy. But should such enemies of christianity succeed, in their attempts to abolish it, it requires no great depth of discernment (especially as *Europe* has furnished us with a recent melancholy example, in point) to foresee, that it would be of pernicious consequence, by removing, in a great measure, from the human mind, or exceedingly weakening that sense of religious and moral obligation, which owes its efficacy to lively impressions of a DEITY, of a governing providence and a future state, and which is evidently the strongest band of union, the most substantial basis of mutual trust and confidence among men, and the firmest support of civil society. For,

WHEN men have once wrought their minds into a persuasion that they are not amenable to any invisible

supreme POWER, and have got above the fear of an approaching day of reckoning, in which *every one must give account of himself to God*, what is there to restrain them (should convenient opportunities offer) from any enormities, to which their inclinations and passions may solicit and urge them? By what ties of conscience or plighted honor, or by what imaginable moral considerations, will such men hold themselves bound to perform any promises, or to fulfil any compacts or engagements, when they shall think it expedient to violate them, and suppose themselves able to do so, without incurring any danger from the resentments of the injured party? Detached from religion, what are truth and fidelity, honor and honesty, friendship and patriotism, benevolence and philanthropy, but sounds of uncertain meaning, or empty boasts of ill-designing and insidious hypocrisy? Such excellent qualities and noble virtues can never be cultivated to advantage, in the fields of irreligion, where they will lie exposed to the perpetual chilling blasts of infidelity and atheism, which will effectually prevent their growth. Religion is their proper soil, and they flourish best under the cultivation of christianity, and the genial beams of the *SUN of righteousness*.

It may indeed be pretended, that the christian religion is a fiction of human original; a *cunningly devised fable*, to answer the purposes of worldly policy; and that the christian priesthood is only an artfully contrived appendage to answer the same purposes; and con-

sequently, that neither ought to be regarded, any otherwise than impositions of men. But there is reason to doubt, whether any one can be found, of competent judgment, and having any feeling sense of the importance of truth and duty, who, after having seriously inquired into the matter, will venture to say, he is certain that this religion is a mere human contrivance, without any stamp of divine authority, or who will dare to recommend it, as prudent and safe, to hazard our eternal interests on that presumption. And if it cannot be proved that christianity is an invention of human policy, we are obliged, in all reason and prudence, to embrace it with reverent regard, and submit to its laws and discipline, as an institution of HEAVEN, graciously intended for the good of mankind. For this being its manifest tendency, should we find ourselves mistaken, in regard to its divinity, we stand upon safe ground, and can be no losers, in the event; whereas, if christianity be of divine original, and we reject it, in opposition to competent evidence, we shall do it at our peril, and may have occasion to bewail our folly, with self-upbraiding remorse, when it shall be too late for amendment.

If christianity be a reality, it must be obvious to every person of common discernment, that our everlasting interests are involved in it, and consequently, that the preachers of it, acting in character, agreeable to the dignity of their high and benevolent office, are entitled to respect and honor, as ministers ordained of God, to

promote the accomplishment of his gracious purposes towards his rational offspring, in this lower world.

WERE people, in general, of all descriptions, sufficiently acquainted with the excellent nature and tendency of the christian system, and willing to receive it upon adequate evidence, there is reason to conclude, there would be very few, if any unbelievers or sceptics among us. It is indeed impossible for us, in these remote ages, to have an ocular view of those mighty works, which the great AUTHOR of our holy religion wrought, during his residence on earth, in confirmation of his heavenly mission and the divinity of the gospel ; but we have as full evidence, as the nature of the thing admits, that the *doctrine of salvation, which first began to be spoken by the LORD*, was confirmed by incontestible miracles ; and consequently that it is of divine original ; since it would be absurd to suppose, that the God of truth, would affix the broad seal of heaven to an imposture ; and equally incredible, that the same God of truth, who can be under no temptation to make use of deception to accomplish his purposes, should permit this doctrine to be propagated among the nations, and transmitted down to posterity, with all possible concomitant moral proof, corroborated by the constant obvious fulfilment of the prophecies, that it at first received miraculous confirmation, if, in reality, no such supernatural attestation had attended it, at first.

If reasonings from analogy be admitted, persuaded I am, that the most plausible objections, that can be urged against the christian system, unadulterated by heterogenous mixtures of human invention, will apply against the doctrine of Providence, and natural religion, at large; and consequently, if they are allowed to be of any force, will plunge us directly into atheism.* Nor can I doubt, but that, upon thorough examination, it will be found, that christianity, as it is transmitted down to us, in the sacred pages of the old and new testaments, is attended with such authentic evidence of divinity, as must be satisfactory and convictive to every serious mind, tolerably well informed, and not under the blinding influence of any corrupt prejudice. For certain it is, that men of good sense and understanding often allow lower degrees of evidence to determine their choice and regulate their conduct, in some of the most important concerns of the present life. What then shall we say of those, who reject the evidence of the gospel, as insufficient, and at the same time judge it reasonable to proceed upon lower evidence, in matters of the greatest consequence pertaining to their temporal interest? Is it not plain that such persons are under the prevailing bias of some base prejudice against the religion of Jesus, connected with an inordinate love of the world? Impartiality lays the mind open to conviction, and does not insist upon greater evidence in the cause of religion, than is allowed to be satisfactory, and a rational ground of action, in the most interesting pursuits of a worldly nature. Let impartiality preside

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in judgment, and christianity will find no great difficulty in gaining a cordial entertainment among all, who are seriously inquisitive and desirous to know what is necessary to advance the perfection and happiness of their natures, and *what they shall do to be saved.*

AND here, let me observe, that, considering the excellent nature and tendency of the gospel, the internal signatures of a divine original with which it is stamped, together with the fulness of external evidence, to the same purpose, which surrounds it, the preachers of it, far from having any occasion to be ashamed of their employment, have the greatest reason to esteem it an honor, that they have been called to the sacred service, in which they are engaged. The gospel-ministry is not only a good, but an honorable work, which confers a dignity upon all, who execute it with fidelity, and do not by their own negligence and folly, degrade themselves into contempt, and give their office occasion to be ashamed of them. For what can be more honorable, than to be employed, as teachers and dispensers of the best religion in the world; a religion, which irradiates the understanding with the most glorious light, enriches the imagination with the brightest objects, fires the passions with an inestimable prize, and, in short, animates the whole soul by the noblest motives, engaging every faculty, in such exercises and actions, as lead to peace and happiness on earth, and to supreme and permanent felicity in the regions of glory above.

THE considerations respecting the nature, dignity, importance and obligations of the office of a christian

minister, that have been suggested in the preceding discourse, have not been mentioned from an imagination that they are not familiar to the thoughts of my brethren, in that sacred office, but with a view to *stir up* their minds, and my own, *by way of remembrance*.—With the same view, they will excuse me, if I add, that the ministers of the gospel, being fellow-laborers in the same noble cause, it greatly behoves them to cultivate harmony among themselves, lest the common cause should suffer, and people should be encouraged, in the indulgence of a bad temper, by beholding in their teachers, the want of charity, and unfraternal behaviour towards each other.

A PERFECT uniformity of sentiment is not indeed to be expected among the clergy, any more than among any other professions of men. Diversities of tempers and geniuses, of capacities and discerning faculties; different situations and circumstances in life, and different modes of education, together with different biases and habits arising from these and the like causes, will always conspire to produce a diversity of sentiments and opinions, in reference to some speculative doctrines and circumstantial forms of religion, even among men, whose pious and holy lives give full evidence, that their faith hath had a salutary operation on their hearts. Should a minister of the gospel dishonor his office and expose himself to just censure by immoral conduct, it would be reasonable indeed for his brethren to stand aloof, and express their disapprobation, by suspending the intimacies of friendship with him, until he should retrieve his character by reformation. I would add, that should

any one of the sacred order so far err from the faith of the gospel (if such a case be supposeable) as to form an alliance with infidels and sceptics, by teaching doctrines evidently inconsistent with any moral differences of actions in rational creatures, and directly subversive of all religion both natural and revealed, it would behove his brethren to reprobate his doctrines, in the most explicit terms, and with the exercise of benevolent regard towards his person, to be cautious of every instance of special friendship, that might be rationally construed, as a practical approbation of his atheistical tenets, or, at least, as expressive of a culpable indifference in themselves towards those essential principles of piety and virtue, of which they wish to be considered as zealous advocates and defenders. But speculative and circumstantial differences, that do not affect the exercise of religion, are perfectly consistent with an union of hearts, and ought by no means to prevent a fraternal friendly intercourse. And when such differences are unaccompanied with ill-natured bigotry and censorious invective, they may answer a valuable purpose. The collision of different sentiments often generates new rays of light, which lead to important discoveries and improvements in theology, as well as philosophy.

THERE being no infallible judge on earth, to whom we can appeal for the decision of disputes and controversies about doctrines and forms of religion, every man has an equal right to decide for himself ; to speak his mind ; to shew his opinion, and to declare the grounds and reasons which have induced him to adopt any particular sentiments, which distinguish him from

others. But no man hath a right to impeach his brother's heart, or to pronounce him an enemy to God and goodness, on account of a diversity of sentiments, in regard to points, which have hitherto been, and probably always will be, matters of dispute among christians, equally wise, pious and learned; or, at least, who appear to be equal, in these respects, to the impartial world. Reproaches of this kind are evidently the vain-glorious effusions of a spirit of pride and arrogance, and calculated to rouse the just indignation and resentment of all, against whom they are directed. For what can be more affrontive to any man, or make it more reasonable for him to be on his guard, than to have his integrity called in question, or to be censured as a stranger to every principle of virtue and true religion, merely because, in the exercise of the right of private judgment, he thinks differently from some others, and (allowing others the same liberty) presumes to act according to his own ideas and sense of obligation?*

* If, because we do not espouse all the articles of our brother's creed, he hath a right to accost us in that reproachful language, *Ye are of your father, the devil*, or in words of the like import. we shall have an undoubted right to recriminate, and upon the same ground, may reasonably retort the censure, and compliment him with the same infamous parentage. For he differs from us as much as we do from him. Nor is infallibility his exclusive prerogative. We can claim it upon as good grounds, as he can.

BUT an habitual indulgence in censures and retorts of this kind is incompatible with that charity, which is the distinguishing genius of the gospel, and especially misbecoming the christian minister, who is under peculiar obligations, to transcribe the religion which he teaches, into a correspondent example.

WOULD the ministers of the gospel make it evident that they have imbibed the true spirit, and experienced the power of that benevolent religion, which they have undertaken to preach, they must not content themselves with sounding the praises of benevolence, in theory ; but take care to transcribe this heavenly virtue into their own temper and conduct, and to shew that it hath taken full possession of their hearts, and diffused its benign influence through all their powers and faculties, by the actual exercise of humility, and meekness, candor and catholicism. A conspicuous display of this divine virtue in their lives, will brighten and adorn their characters, and at once dignify their office, and shew that they are intent upon *magnifying it*. Nor is there any thing that will conduce more directly to promote their usefulness and success in their sacred employment, than this heavenly temper, exhibited in practice, on all occasions ; as it will be a constant illustrious evidence of the beauty, excellence and happy operation of the religion which they teach, and mightily recommend it to the embraces of others.

INSPIRED with that divine temper of love and charity, which is inculcated both by the example and doctrine of the meek and benevolent Jesus, and which is the noblest trait in the character of every true christian, may the candidate for ordination enter upon and prosecute the sacred work, to which he is now to be solemnly consecrated. I doubt not but he has felt himself deeply interested, while attending to the observations, that have been made, in the preceding discourse, respecting the nature and importance of the christian

religion, and the duties, obligations and high responsibility of those, who engage in the work of the christian ministry. It would be no wonder, should he feel disheartened under the impression of those solemn considerations and a consciousness of human insufficiency, when contemplating the difficulty and arduousness of the work before him, were it not for the encouraging assurance, which God hath given his ministers, of divine aids sufficient for them. With peculiar pertinency may the ministers of the gospel adopt and appropriate to themselves, that apostolic language, *We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits, in high places.* But their encouragement is, that *through Christ strengthening them, they can do all things.* Equipt with divine armour, I trust my young friend and brother will be an overmatch for Satan and all his incarnate agents and vaunting emissaries, whose boasted illumination and philosophy terminate in the dreary gulf of annihilation and everlasting non-existence. It is impossible for me to express those affectionate feelings, with which I wish him divine benedictions, a successful ministry and a future crown of glory. May the *Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift*, enrich his soul with treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and with all ministerial furniture, and dispose and enable him to *magnify his office*, by a faithful discharge of the duties of it, that amidst whatever troubles and difficulties he may be called to encounter, in the course of his ministrations, he may have the ineffable satisfaction of con-

scious integrity, and be supported by the gratulations of his own heart, and transporting anticipations of the glorious rewards laid up in store for all, who shall be able to give a good account of their stewardship, when their LORD shall call them to a reckoning.

THE church and people of GOD, in this place, will accept my most cordial congratulations, on the present joyful occasion. The harmony in which they lived with their former worthy and respectable pastor,* and which has marked their proceedings in the choice of a successor, sheds a lustre on this auspicious day, and affords the most flattering hopes, that great blessings are in store for them and their posterity. May the sacred connection which is now to be formed and solemnly ratified, according to divine direction, between them and the young servant of GOD, whom they have elected for their pastor, be attended with the happiest consequences, and prove a source of mutual comforts and consolations to him and them, on their journey to the heavenly ZION, till death, at some distant period, shall dissolve the important tie. *Esteeming him highly in love for his work's sake*, and paying him all respectful regards, suitable to his office, as a minister of the gospel, may they be edified in faith and holiness under his ministry; and, while progressing in their preparation for glory, honor and immortality,

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in the heavenly world, may they continue to know, by happy experience, *how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.* And may the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep their hearts and minds, through JESUS CHRIST.

The special attention paid to my brethren, in the ministry, in handling the subject of the preceding discourse, precludes the necessity of a particular address to them. May their minds, and my own, be suitably affected with whatever has been said, agreeable to truth, respecting the nature and design, dignity and importance of the ministerial office. May the everlasting JEHOVAH bestow his blessing upon us, and upon the churches and christian societies committed to our charge, and crown with success, our earnest endeavors to advance the interest of the REDEEMER'S kingdom, that we may have the satisfaction of beholding *the pleasure of the LORD prospering in our hands.* And may a lively hope and joyful prospect of a glorious reward, when our present scene of service shall be completed, be our present support and consolation, and the actual possession of it, our final portion.

I SHALL now close with a few words addressed to this assembly at large. The office of a christian minister being of divine appointment, mercifully designed to promote the repentance and salvation of sinners, in general, it is evident, that people of all orders, ranks and classes, are nearly concerned in the subject, that has been under consideration. If preaching be a divine ordinance, for the advancement of the purposes of evangelical grace, it behoves all people to regard it

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as such, by a conscientious attendance on the ministrations of those, who are properly authorized to engage in that important service, wherever providence favors them with opportunities for that purpose.

Let us, my hearers, gratefully improve gospel light and advantages, as invaluable blessings of HEAVEN, unmerited, freely bestowed; and endeavour to live up to our glorious privileges and sublime hopes.

THE gospel, unlike the inapplicable theories of false philosophy, contemplates human nature, as it is; and will be found, upon the most careful examination, to be an institution mercifully accommodated to the wants and circumstances of sinful and guilty mortals, and admirably calculated to mend the heart, reform the life and promote the greatest good of man. This being the case, christianity is worthy of our most cordial embraces, and grateful acceptance, and its laws and ordinances ought to be received, with reverent submission and regard.

It must be obvious to all, who will seriously think of the matter, that a compliance with the institutions of christian worship, is not only a personal concernment to each individual, but of the greatest consequence to the welfare of society. Whoever therefore treats them with careless disregard, as unimportant matters, sets an example which cannot be universally followed, without introducing the greatest confusion and disorder among men. The *forms of godliness* may indeed exist *without the power* of it; but we have no reason to expect *the power* of it, where its *forms* are laid aside, or but very little regarded. Should christians grow

careless about the public institutions of religion, and *forsake the assembling themselves together, as the manner of too many is*, both their faith and morality would soon be obliged to yield to the encroachments of infidelity, and scepticism.

WHAT then must be the emotions of anxious concern, in the breast of every serious and devout worshiper of God, and hearty friend to his brethren and fellow-citizens, when he attends to the moral complexion of the present times, and observes with what indifference and neglect; yea more, with what contempt and derision, many treat the institutions of the christian sabbath, and of the christian ministry, and the ordinances of public worship! In how many places do the unfrequented gates of ZION mourn, while the temples of vice and courts of licentiousness are thronged and crowded! How melancholy is it to observe religion, in many places, leaning, in pensive solitude, upon the deserted holy altar, while the votaries of libertinism, her worthless rival, turning a deaf ear to all her calls and invitations, pay their daily and most ardent devoirs at the shrine of that licentious philosophy (if the appellation of philosophy may be given to that licentiousness) which *exalteth itself above all that is called God and worshipped!* These things are for a lamentation. But of you, my hearers, I would hope better things, feeling disposed to indulge the pleasing expectation, that under the prevailing influence of the great considerations of truth, duty and everlasting interest, you will, by your own noble example, check the progress of such growing evils, and recommend to all around

you, a conscientious uniform attendance on the public offices of religion and divine worship, and the practice of all those christian graces and virtues, which are necessary to dignify and ennoble the human character.

AND now may the FATHER of mercies, and source of all good, through the merits of his SON, JESUS CHRIST, our LORD, shower down all needed blessings upon you, pertaining to time and eternity, and grant especially, that by a due improvement of gospel-privileges and advantages; and a diligent attendance upon the services of his sanctuary here below, you may be formed to an heavenly temper and character, and be prepared for the sublime worship of the *habitation of his holiness* above, that you may *come to the heavenly ZION, with songs and everlasting joy on your heads*, and join angels and arch-angels, and the *spirits of the just made perfect*, in those celestial exercises of contemplation and devotion, which will excite the highest raptures, and fill the soul with "beatitude past utterance," for ever and ever.—AMEN.

10 OC 67



